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December 3, 2004



Mr. Kenneth Blodgett
Surface Transportation Board
Case Control Unit
Washington, D.C. 20423

RE: Tongue River Railroad
STB Finance Docket #301111186
(Sub #3)

Dear Mr. Blodgett:

Recently I attended a hearing in Miles City, MT concerning an EIS regarding the above named project. Specifically, the hearing involved a proposed alternative to the southernmost segment of the TRR known as the Western alignment. However, comment from those speaking at the hearing had little or nothing to do with the Western Alignment. Rather, it was, once again, a opportunity for the naysayers to register their complaints about the railroad in general.

Please include me among supporters of the Tongue River Railroad project, and in support of the Western Alignment which appears to be less intrusive and more environmentally friendly than the Four Mile Creek route.

I am a CPA in Miles City and life long citizen of southeastern Montanan. My family heritage is agriculture, and I continually observe the economics of agriculture in my profession. After attending the hearing, I have the following comments.

1. I very much appreciate the Tongue River ranchers/farmers points of view. There is little argument that a railroad would be disruptive to their operations for a while at least, creating barriers and crossing issues. There will be added noise. They are resourceful and will adapt, as have many before them. Generous settlements for right of way may very well mitigate the objections. Such could provide sufficient resources to purchase life insurance to provide for absentee children, to retire debt, to make capital purchases not possible without bonus capital. Thousands of ranchers/farmers co-exist with railroads all across the country.
2. A representative of area railroad employees voiced an objection that their jobs are in jeopardy. I submit that the only risk is a change in location. Among the features of free enterprise is the right to operate in the most efficient manner possible, such as a shorter route. It's no different than a Tongue River rancher choosing to

build a bridge across the river to shorten his distance to his fields or road to market.

3. Concerns were expressed that neither the railroad nor coal mining were economically viable because of insufficient demand. Private enterprise will make that determination, which has apparently already been concluded, or there would no longer be interest from a railroad or from mine developers.
4. Without question, development of the railroad, likely followed by coal mining and power plants, will enhance the tax bases of area governments. Not only will it generate greater tax revenue for these entities, but it will lessen the tax burden on Tongue River and all other property owners, as existing tax levies are spread in part to these new industries.
5. Miles City and other commerce centers are dependent on population for a sufficient customer base. Without such, fewer goods and services, including medical, are available to our ranch customers. Off farm employment, especially for farm spouses, would be less available. A healthy economy will promote increased shopping, recreation and entertainment opportunities.
6. Specific economic enhancements include more jobs during construction phases, railroad operation, mine operation, generation plant operation, attendant supply and administration activities.

In summary, the economic potential of this project, coupled with generous settlements to affected landowners outweighs the emotional fears and environmental arguments. For the reasons stated above, I strongly urge the STB to approve all facets of the TRR and to promptly move forward. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,


Douglas H. Bengé, CPA

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